

Genesis 22:1-14  
 The Sacrifice of Isaac/ Abraham's Biggest Mistake  
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May the God who creates....

Good Morning

“God said, ‘Take your son, your only son whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah. Offer him up as an entirely burned offering, there on one of the mountains that I will show you.’” Genesis 22:2

“He took his son, his only son...” I’m going to dig in, start with this story, but I’m going to begin-- with the end.

He flunked the test. Abraham flunked the test, he said “Yes,” when the only answer was “No.”

“No, I will not take my son, my only son  
 and walk him to a mountain,  
 and bind him hand and foot  
 and put him on an altar.  
 No. No I will not.

Abraham flunked the test.

Let’s take a closer look at the text. Up to this point in the story God and Abraham have been having regular conversations. God asks Abraham to leave his homeland. God tells Abraham he will be blessed. When God wants to destroy a city for their extreme lack of hospitality, Abraham bargains and argues with God. Saying such things as, “Will you destroy the city if there are 40 faithful people?”

No

“What about 30? Will you destroy the city even if there are 30 faithful people?”

No—

“What about 20?” And so on.

Back and forth with God, bargaining and pushing back for strangers.

But then --- after this test, after Abraham mutely, passively does what he believes God is asking. Abraham, who has spent a fair amount of time chatting up the Lord, after Abraham silently acquiesces to the idea of sacrificing his son— AND after the Angel of the Lord stops Abraham from doing an unspeakable deed, never again in scripture does God speak to Abraham.

Never again in scripture do he and his wife Sarah speak. In fact, Sarah dies in the very next chapter after Abraham and Isaac's trip to Mount Moriah. Midrash says, she dies of a broken heart. She cannot believe that Abraham would even think of doing such a thing. Scripture tells us that Isaac mourned her death for years, (Genesis 24:67) but says only he was blessed after his father's death, (Gen. 25:11).

Author Sarah Maitland, in a short story depicts Abraham and Isaac's return from that trip this way, "Abraham came back from the land of Moriah smug, contented, smooth and sleek. Isaac came back from the land of Moriah like a wild animal, bound but not tamed. For months afterwards he would wake in the night screaming and his mother, in the women's tent, would hear her boy child sobbing and could not go to him, comfort him hold him. There was a look in his eyes still, evasive, distant, the look of [one] a man who uses pride to cover betrayal." (p. 30 *Angel and Me*)

In the text, in case you were wondering, after "The Trip" there is no recorded conversation between Abraham and Isaac ever again.

Theologian Karen Armstrong says, "After the 'test' Isaac never speaks in his prime. Instead just a mere two chapters later we encounter Isaac as a prematurely aged, blind, and dying man—an eloquent image of a blighted existence. Isaac's life seems a blank after his father bound him on the altar and came at him with a knife." (In *the Beginning: A new Interpretation of Genesis* pp 70-71)

Isaac becomes the most passive of all the patriarchs. He doesn't even go and find his own wife, Abraham sends a servant to do the choosing. The next time Isaac speaks and is anything more than a recipient of actions, he is frail, blind and being duped by his wife and youngest one into giving his blessing to the wrong son.

We can only presume that Isaac never recovered. Isaac never moved on.

Is this really what God wants? For Isaac's life to be permanently scarred?

What would have happened if Abraham had said, "No." What if he had bargained for his son, the way he'd done for others? What if he had said, "No, I stand up and speak against injustice. What if Abraham heard it all wrong? What if it was a test and he flunked it? What if the whole point of God's outrageous request was to see if Abraham would speak truth to power. What if the test was to see if Abraham would acquiesce to suffering as long as the blood that was spilled, the breath that ceased was not his?

My friends, I think of our world as it is-- now. I think of all the parts of our world, that I have just accepted on face value: the policing practices I have failed to scrutinize, the education failings I have ignored, the violence I have chosen not to see. Could it be, that I, like Abraham, perhaps you as well, perhaps we have not questioned what we understood to be true. Perhaps we too have chosen as Abraham did, to acquiescence to suffering, instead of wrestling, questioning, accepting injustice rather than the hard, long-term fraught work of righting untenable situations.

I'm pretty sure that Abraham flunked the test, and so might we, but here is what gives me hope. God still blesses Abraham, God is still able to use even the most flawed of us for amazing good. Witness Abraham, Moses, Naomi, David, the list goes on. God uses flawed humans to change our world. Case in point, ten chapters later, Isaac's son, his youngest son, Jacob a flawed conniving cheating man if there ever was, he becomes one of the greatest patriarchs ever. His transformation happens when?

He is transformed he becomes a changed man after he wrestles on the riverbank with the angel all night long. At dawn, at his insistence, the Angel blesses him and gives him a new name, Israel, which means one who struggles with God.

Our call my friends, our call is to question our world, wrestle with how it seems to be ordered and never ever passively, with complicity give in to what seems wrong, lest we too flunk the test.

In God's Holy Name, we pray.